

Information Sheet No.41

A brief history of the ACT Education System

ACT schools were initially established and administered by the NSW Education Department. During the 1960s pressure grew within the Canberra community to move towards a less centralised structure. A committee produced a report recommending an independent education authority for the ACT (The Currie Report) advocating a considerable degree of school autonomy, particularly in curriculum development, and participation by teachers and parents in decision-making about school policies.

In 1972 the Commonwealth Government agreed to examine the proposals for a separate ACT Education system taking on responsibility for ACT schools. In early 1973, a departmental paper, *An Education Authority for the ACT*, was distributed for public discussion. The Hughes Report analysed the responses to this in *A Design for the Governance and Organisation of Education in the ACT* and the Interim ACT Schools Authority met for the first time in October 1973. The ACT Schools Authority Ordinance 1976 set out its functions and powers, its membership and the requirement for all government schools to have School Boards which gave the community a major role in the decision-making process.

A further area canvassed was the concept of separate schools for Years 11 & 12. The outcome of the 1973 Campbell Report, *Secondary Education for Canberra*, was a restructure of secondary education in the ACT in 1976 resulting in high schools for Years 7-10 and secondary colleges for Years 11-12.

The ACT school system was an important experiment in educational administration. A highly centralised and rigid system was replaced by one with an independent governing body, community and teacher participation and a decentralised and more flexible school system. School Boards were established to determine the educational policies and programs of the school, the use of funds and to develop links between the school and the community.

The decision in late 1987 by the Federal Government to abolish the Schools Authority undermined the basic organisational features of the ACT education system which had allowed parents and teachers to have an effective voice in the governance of the system. Responsibility for the operation of the ACT school system is now vested in the Department of Education. Parent participation has been reduced from participation in top-level decision-making on the Schools Authority Council to a much more "ad hoc" and "by invitation only" approach. Since self-government, successive governments have established special ministerial advisory committees comprising representatives of parents, teachers, students and others. The Ministerial Advisory Council for Public Education (MACPE) was established by the ACT Government in late 1992; this was replaced with the Ministerial Advisory Council for Government Schools (MACGS) and now by the Government Schools Education Council (GSEC).

The ACT Education Act 2004 replaced the Schools Authority Act 1976. The Act came into force on 1 January 2005, which necessitated the development of key guidelines for the interpretation of the provisions of the Act. ★